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THE ROCK SPRINGS MONEY JUGGLE

Continued from page 6

the little rat shadowed from the time he starts for the circus lot until I connect with you?"

"Sure thing. But what's the idea?"

"Nothing tangible: just a hunch. If it pans out, you'll know the whole story by the time the grand entrance starts in the afternoon."

FOR two hours I tossed about the bunk, wide awake and thinking, while Sam snored loud enough to wake the dead. At breakfast he broached the Angelotti subject by wanting to know if I still purposed rifling his room. I did, and he started for the lot, after telling Timson to keep the sword swallower in sight until he was told to quit. Half an hour after the train stopped most of the workmen and performers were on their way to the cookhouse a mile away for breakfast, Angelotti among them.

I saw him swing off the front of the car, gaze up and down the tracks, and finally, after discovering nothing to upset his mind or his appetite, hike toward the coffee, steak, pancakes, and potatoes, the customary circus breakfast. He carried a medium-sized Gladstone bag, which I recalled was with him when he boarded the train two towns back. It struck me as peculiar that a sideshow performer should carry a valise to and from the lot, and I spoke of it to Jeff, the colored boy, who took care of Sam's end of the car. Jeff said he always toted the satchel, which didn't make it seem less peculiar.

When the car was finally emptied of its occupants save Harkins' servant and the Kinkers' porter—an English lad who had fallen from a trapeze, broken a leg, and been relegated to the inactive discards—I went forward, and found the latter on the front platform rolling a cigarette. He refused to accept a ready-made coffin nail from my case; but was willing to talk about any and everything concerning the show. I had only to mention Angelotti when he started.

"There's a queer 'un," said he. "Queerest Hi ever seen. Hacts like a bloomin' harisocrat. Whoever 'card of a rotten sword swallower with a stateroom all to 'imself? An' w'y the bleedin' luggage in 'is mit hevver time 'e treks to 'is stinkin' little freak top? Such hairs you never seed, Sir. If 'e wishes to stay in an expensive 'otel, 'e just misses the train an' lights on the lot next mornin' as if 'e owned the show. An' do you catch the miserable little banana gnawer fraternizin' with the other freaks, let alone the performers, which the same are 'is betters? Not on your life! 'E's a queer 'un, Sir, an' a 'opeless, bleedin' mystery. W'y the boss don't can 'im Hi can't understand."

When I asked to have a look at Angelotti's stateroom the porter showed the way.

"There's w're the rotter sleeps—sometimes," said he, pointing to an open door.

A bed not yet made up, a small locker for toilet articles, a raincoat and two hats on hooks, a couple of pairs of shoes, a canvas carryall, half a dozen magazines, and a freshly pressed serge suit seemed to be the only things in the room. I was struck by the tininess of the man's shoes—they were positively a child's size—and by the contents of the locker. A bottle of cologne and a half empty jar of cold cream were among the collection of junk. In the pocket of the raincoat I found a letter which I was about to open when the porter's whistle sounded from the platform.

"Ere comes the beggar now!" said he.

I CRUSHED the letter in my hand and slipped through the door into Harkins' end of the car. Through the window I could see Angelotti approaching. Half a block behind him walked a ticket taker, evidently deputized by Timson to keep the little man in view. Timson had charge of the parade, and could hardly be spared at this hour. The sword swallower entered the car from the front, and the shadow squatted in the shade of a tree beside the tracks where he could see under the cars and thus perceive the entrance and departure of anyone by either side. I smoothed out the envelop, drew out the letter, and started to read. It was addressed to Mrs. Elmer Barnes, care of general delivery, Bucyrus, Ohio, and read:

DEAR MRS. BARNES.—Will arrive R—S—Monday 1 P. M. Engage rooms. E. R.

It was typed, signature and all, on ordinary typewriter paper, and didn't say or mean much. I slipped it into my pocket, intending to replace it as soon as Angelotti left the car. This he did in a minute, luging the canvas carryall. I looked into his bunking place, and found he had cleaned it out—not even a toothbrush remained. From the platform the porter and I watched him trudge off toward the circus ground,

followed by the ticket taker. Just before he was lost to view behind a billboard near the tracks he turned, saw me, and waved his hand.

"Good-a-by, Meester!" he yelled. "Good-a-by and good-a-luck!"

"Guess the boss canned the rotter," said the porter. "Wile I 'ates 'im, 'e's no piker," and he displayed a five-dollar bill which the sword swallower had just given him.

I WAS trying to think; but could make neither head nor tail out of the whole business. I reached for the stolen letter, and pulled out a wad of papers. On top, next the Mrs. Barnes communication, lay the Rock Springs advertisement. Just a coincidence, of course, but a curious one. I read the letter twenty times, holding it to the light to see if there was a watermark. It was the sort of paper used for carbon copies, and hadn't an unusual thing—watermark, date, blot, or pen scratch—to distinguish it from all the other thin, cheap paper in the world. The envelop, postmarked Chicago, was plain save for the stamp and the address, which had been made by a typewriter.

I fell to reading the electric railway bill, which I had not seen since I had started for the train in Rock Springs a fortnight before. Near the bottom, just above the "N. B.," I ran across something that caused me to jump and hustle back to Sam's desk where I found a pad of telegraph blanks and wrote:

DERBY HOTEL.

Derby.

Were Mr. and Mrs. Elmer Barnes registered at any hotel in Rock Springs June twelfth? Wire description collect. Important.

I grabbed another blank and dashed off this:

JOHN HENRY McCANN, JR.
Hotel, Rock Springs.

If Mr. and Mrs. Elmer Barnes registered at any hotel in Rock Springs June twelfth get description and take St. Louis Limited for here. TOM.

Just before leaving New York I had watched some rehearsals of "The Dancing Widow," which was now playing at the Chicago Opera House. The press agent had worked on "The Globe" with me. On another blank I scratched:

JAMES BOOTON.

Chicago Opera House, Chicago, Ill.

Find out if Kendall Richman, 147 State-st. was in Chicago June twelfth, thirteenth, fourteenth. Wire me immediately.

Making all three wires "Rush!" I gave them and a handful of change to Jeff, told him to tear to the railway station and send them while I hurried to the lot. The parade was ready to start, and Sam was sitting on the steps of the Red Wagon.

"Where's Angelotti?" said I, quite out of breath.

"In the tent where he belongs," said Sam. "I'm going to let him go after the night show. No use keeping a man who isn't satisfied. He'll just make trouble while he's here, and he'll beat it anyhow if he wants to. Timson's got a man watching the dogs," he added, and walked away to send off the parade.

The cavalcade of horses, bands, elephants, camels, animal cages, and steam calliope returned to the lot an hour later, and with the last band wagon a messenger boy squirmed through the crowd with this line from Jack:

They did. Local hotel clerk not an O. Henry; but have fair description. Arrive seven-ten. McCANN.

During the afternoon performance an answer arrived from Chicago. Kendall Richman had not been at his offices June 12, 13, and 14, and was not there now. He had gone to Indianapolis on business. Booton added that his show had caught on, that George Kingsbury was thriving, and that I should give their combined regards to the Fat Girl, the Wart Hog, and the Elephant—if we had one. I also received an interesting seventy-word message from the Derby Hotel clerk,—a very interesting message.

Meanwhile I was unloading my tale on Harkins. When I finished—it took me sometime because what I had to tell was a long list of disjointed guesses—he let loose a low whistle.

"Sufferin' catfish!" said Sam after the whistle had died for lack of wind. "Go a little careful on this! So far the season has been fine for me; but can you see the newspapers if what you surmise is true and gets out? Let's try to handle the thing as far as we can without the aid of police. Anyhow, it's all surmise. Maybe it'll blow up into thin air. Remember the business of a circus